

Interview with a Library Leader
Kristin “Krissa” Stewart
University of Southern California

LIM 500
Dr. Christopher Stewart
October 3, 2020

Interview with a Library Leader

The library leader I interviewed is, Jeff Makala the current Special Collections Librarian and University Archivist at Furman University, a position he has held for 5 years. This makes him the head of the small Special Collections department, located in the James B. Duke Library, a position which requires him to report directly to Furman's Director of Libraries. Furman University is a private liberal arts university located in Greenville, South Carolina. Furman University was originally founded in 1826, with its initial library opened at the same time with 620 volumes. The James B. Duke Library as it is known today was founded in 1956. Today, the Duke Library, as it is commonly referred to by students, stands in the center of campus and is frequented by all student, faculty, and staff.

Jeff Makala earned his MLS in Illinois while working in the University Archives as a book preservationist. After graduation he was hired as a Special Collections Librarian and Processing Archivist at Wesleyan University, where he worked for seven years. From there he moved on to become the Instruction Librarian in Special Collections at the University of South Carolina Columbia, while also processing literary manuscripts. After working there for 10 years, Makala moved to his current position at Furman University. Makala believes that there are no leadership skills that increase your ability to be a leader in libraries, but instead that leadership skills are universal to all leadership roles. He states that the most important skills he implements are empathy, listening skills, being able to solicit input from your staff, and being able to articulate a shared mission.

Within the Furman Library system, there are 13 librarians and 13 members of support staff, as well as many student assistants, spread over three libraries. These are the main James B. Duke Library, the Robert J. Maxwell Music Library, and the Sanders Science Library. The two

branches are in a very autonomous position as well, they each have their own designated head librarian who oversees collections and staffing for their branch, only reporting to the Assistant Director for Outreach Services. Still, they are mostly trusted to run their branches without much interference or micromanaging.

Within the Furman Library System, there is no Dean that requires to be reported to, instead the library is treated like an academic department, included in all meetings other departments are while reporting directly to the Vice President of the University. At the head of the Furman Library system is the Director of Libraries, Makala reporting directly to her the Special Collections Librarian and University Archivist and having one member of staff under him, the Special Collections Assistant. Three Assistant Directors also report to the Director of Libraries, the Assistant Director for Discovery Services, the Assistant Director for Collection Services, and the Assistant Director for Outreach Services. Under the Assistant Director for Discovery Services are two librarians and three members of staff, under the Assistant Director for Collection Services are seven members of staff, under the Assistant Director for Outreach Services are six librarians and one member of staff. Underneath all these professionals and support staff are numerous student workers, who handle most of the day to day operations such as working the check out and resource desks.

The Furman Library System is defined by being responsive to the needs of their patrons, engaged with the community around them, and working closely with professors and students to ensure student success. This is something you will hear for most students about Furman as a whole and often the mission, vision, and core values of the university as a whole match up quite well with those of the Furman Library System. The Furman Library System states its mission is “We provide exceptional services, resources, and spaces to anticipate and respond to the

evolving curricular needs and strategic directions of the Furman community” (Furman, 2020).

The vision is stated as the library trying to be “...a catalyst for creative exploration and transformative knowledge” (Furman, 2020). The values are stated as:

1. Being an inclusive community.
2. Connecting individuals, ideas, and areas of study.
3. Cultivating research, creativity, curiosity, and critical thinking.
4. Dedication to service.
5. Building meaningful relationships.
6. Fostering a culture of encouragement, enrichment, creativity, and fun!

(Furman, 2020)

Furman University has an action plan in place to help students succeed both within their undergraduate career and beyond it, by offering different and increasing opportunities like internships and mentoring throughout one’s four years at Furman.

Like other academic libraries, the Furman University Library System receives most of their money directly from the school’s tuition, though they also receive money in a few other ways. One of those ways is through endowments, donations made to be used for a specific purpose. The one that Makala mentioned specifically was the Duke Endowment. They also receive donations from alumni to be used more broadly. With all these sources of revenue considered, the budget for the library can be formed. At Furman University, the process seems to be far less formal than at other universities. Makala describes the process as a “back and forth,” a very informal process that is foundationally built on trust and past positive experiences. Usually, about 2/3 of the budget will go to electronic collections, 1/6 into physical materials, and the rest to everything else that a library needs to run properly. Makala says that the informal nature of

budgeting to a sign of a well-run small university. The close relationships and trust are far more difficult to replicate in a large university and Makala believes the library runs more smoothly because of this trust.

Like every library, the Furman University library creates many programs to increase the interaction between the community and the library. Many of these are run through the Friends of the Library, an organization that alumni and community members can join by providing donations to the library. The library often invites speakers to talk to students, staff, and interested members of the public. The library also hosts the annual National Poetry Month in April, an month long event that involves speakers, poetry readings, a poetry contest, and little things such as a poetry tree, where you can hang lines from your favorite poems on a tree outside the library. Occasionally, a book launch party will be held for a member of the faculty who has gotten published. Finally, one of the most obvious things the library does from the viewpoint of the students, hosting Cultural Life Programs (CLPs). These are events all Furman students are required to attend to graduate. Every student must attend 32 of these events over the course of their four years. These are done on almost any subject one can imagine and the library will often have a hand in planning and hosting these.

The Furman University Library System is about what one would expect for an academic library. It includes a main library and two connected specialty branches, receives its budget from tuition and donations, and serves mostly students and faculty. What seems to make Furman and the Furman Library different is its size and how involved it is with its community. As a smaller University and thus a smaller library, the Furman Library is thus closer knit with a lot of trust between administration and librarians. Budgets do not need to be decided on in a formal setting because of that trust, and the libraries can run with little interference from people who might not

have ever worked in a library. This also allows the librarians to focus a good portion of there energy on the students and programs to help the students. Many Furman students will spend most of their college hours inside the library, studying, researching, and receiving aid. Having a welcoming library and librarians that have the time to assist students will make a library feel more welcoming and open.

Furman University. (2020, March 11). *Values, Mission, and Vision*. James B. Duke
Library. <http://libguides.furman.edu/library/mission>